

Historic Pioneer Courthouse Rededicated

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By OCE Public Information Office

The venerable Pioneer Courthouse, home to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in Portland, Ore., was officially rededicated last week following a nearly \$24 million seismic retrofit and historic restoration project.

Several hundred guests attended the rededication ceremony held Monday (Dec. 12) in Pioneer Square Plaza, just across the street from the 130-year-old landmark. Ninth Circuit Chief Judge Mary M. Schroeder and Circuit Judge Diarmuid F. O'Scannlain, one of four resident judges with chambers in the courthouse, spoke on behalf of the court, offering words of appreciation for all those involved in the project.

"The General Services Administration deserves credit. They did this one right," Judge Schroeder said of the federal agency that manages court facilities.

The federal courts have championed historic preservation of public buildings throughout the west, Judge Schroeder added, citing as examples the Jacob Weinberger United States Courthouse in San Diego and Ninth Circuit's own headquarters, the James R. Browning U.S. Courthouse in San Francisco. She noted that the late Judge Richard H. Chambers, chief judge of Ninth Circuit from 1959 to 1976, played a major role in preservation efforts, including acquiring furniture now used in Pioneer Courthouse.

"Judge Chambers, wherever he is, is smiling right now," she said.

Judge O'Scannlain observed that the courthouse has been restored to its 1875 luster, yet also represents the state of the art in new technology, including the latest in videoconferencing and other advances. And, while it no



The main courthouse entrance faces onto Pioneer Square Plaza



The ceremony was held in a tent set up in the plaza



Chief Judge Schroeder gave credit to GSA



Courthouse has state of the art technology, Judge O'Scannlain said



Courtroom's oak woodwork has been restored to original luster



Visitors Center provides information on restoration project



Scenic views from the cupola atop the courthouse

longer houses a post office, the courthouse remains a public place that welcomes visitors, he said, pointing to the addition of a first-floor visitors center that features a looping video presentation describing the seismic and restoration work.

"There is much to see and learn from," Judge O'Scannlain said in urging citizens to stop by the courthouse.

Pioneer Courthouse is the oldest public building in Oregon and the second oldest federal building on the West Coast (the U.S. Mint in San Francisco is the oldest). Opened in 1875 and expanded in 1905, it housed the federal district court, customs office and U.S. Post Office for many years.

The building very nearly fell to the wrecking ball in the 1930s and again in the late 1960s, when it was targeted for demolition to make way for a parking lot. Historic preservationists were successful in preserving the building thanks in large part to an agreement under which the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals became a major tenant, beginning in 1970. In 1977, the building was designated a National Historic Landmark.

The seismic retrofit and restoration cost \$23.4 million and lasted nearly 21 months. The seismic work included installation of 75 devices known as base isolators, which allow movement of the earth and building by as much as 17 inches from side to side and one inch upward during a major earthquake. In addition, building movement would occur within a new 18-inch moat that surrounds the foundation, hidden from view by stairways and walkways. The repairs are expected to add a century or more to the life of a building.